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DOCUMENTS

A VANISHED BISHOPRIC OF OHIO

Almost twenty years have passed since the venerable President of the United States Catholic Historical Society, of New York, Dr. Charles G. Herbermann, contributed to the *Historical Records and Studies* (Vol. i (1899), pp. 77-97) an article of great merit on *A French Emigré Colony in the United States (1789-93)*. The story he tells in these pages is one of the most fascinating incidents of our colonial Catholic history, and though several attempts have been made to fill in the *lacunae* which occur in the article, it remains substantially the best account we have of this marvelous scheme. John Finley's recent volume, *The French in the Heart of America* (New York, 1915), is silent on this French Catholic Colony on the banks of the Ohio, and it is to be regretted that he neglected to treat it, for it would have glowed with renewed interest under the facile pen of one so sympathetic to the subject. It was not the first time since the coming of Champlain that the French had tried to found an empire within the borders of the present territory of the United States, and the story of the Scioto Company has a pathetic appeal to the historical student in this, that, when the settlers of Gallipolis and Marietta gave up the attempt and left for St. Louis, New Orleans, and elsewhere, it was the beginning of the end of French influence in that great territory of the Mississippi Valley which they had once so gloriously controlled.

"The active part taken by Lafayette, Rochambeau, d'Estaing, Barnave, and many other French noblemen in the War of Independence, the alliance of France with our Revolutionary forefathers, and the enthusiastic admiration of the young republic, ardently proclaimed by many of their countrymen, could not fail to direct the attention of the French to the United States as a desirable home."¹ Prominent among these was M. du Val d'Esprémesnil, one of the leaders of the Scioto Company, which had succeeded in obtaining from the Ohio Land Company a vast territory of about three million acres, situated between the Ohio and Scioto Rivers.² An office was opened in Paris, where the American directors of the company were represented by an English engineer,

¹ HERBERMANN, *loc. cit.* Cf. M. HENRI CARRÉ in the *Revue de Paris*, May 15, 1898. Other sources for the history of the Scioto Company will be found in VOLNEY, *Tableau du Climat et du Sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, Paris, 1803; Eng. trans. London, 1804; *Virginia Gazette*, for May 6, 1790; ROBIN, *New Travels in America*, Eng. trans. Phila., 1783; BRISSOT DE WARVILLE, *Nouveau Voyage dans les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale fait en 1788*, Paris, 1791, three volumes; HUTCHINS, *Topographical Description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina Comprehending the Rivers Ohio, Kenhawa, Scioto, etc., etc.*, London, 1778; DILHET, *Elat de l'Eglise*, Paris, 1796; SPALDING, *Life of Flaget*, Louisville, 1852; Ohio, article in the *North American Review*, Vol. xiii (1841), pp. 320-60; BELOTE, *The Scioto Speculation and the French Settlement at Gallipolis*, Cincinnati, 1907.

² Cf. *American State Papers*, Vol. i, p. 29, *Public Lands*. Washington, 1834. "Nothing was talked of in every social circle, but the paradise that was opened for Frenchmen in the western wilderness; the free and happy life to be led on the blissful banks of the Scioto," HOWE, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, p. 178. Cincinnati, 1847.

William Playfair.³ Among the French shareholders we find mentioned, besides d'Esprémesnil, the Marquis de Marnesia, the Marquis de Gaville, Viscount de Malartic, Baron de la Bretèche, De Lally, Mounier, Malonet, De Vichy, De Maubranche, Thiébaud, and Madame de Laval. D'Esprémesnil was the heart of the company, and in his plans for this colony at Gallipolis, the settlement of which had been begun by the American promoters in preparation for the coming of the émigrés, he determined to resurrect the spiritual and religious life of his nation that had been swallowed up in the chaos of the French Revolution, which was then high on the road towards its worst excesses. The first emigrants for this colonial dream of empire, in what was then a wilderness, left Havre, on May 26, 1790, and numbered in all 139 persons. These were followed by many others, and during the first half of the year 1790, more than a thousand French colonists reached the United States under the guidance of the Scioto Company. By December, 1790, most of them were gathered at Gallipolis and Marietta.⁴ But disaster was soon to fall upon the luckless emigrants. When these lands were sold to the Scioto Company, the Indians were still in possession of them, and the French emigrants were soon made to understand that they could only keep the land they had bought by buying it a second time from the Indians themselves. The colonists then made appeal to the American Government, and General St. Clair, with a regiment of 3,000 soldiers, was sent to drive the Indians from the territory. The sad defeat which followed, in which nearly one-half of his troops were killed and scalped by the Indians, placed the sign-manual of failure on the enterprise, and part of the colonists went to New Orleans, part to the North, and part to St. Louis.⁵ Some of the inhabitants of Gallipolis took refuge in Virginia; and others, led by Marnesia, founded the settlement called *Asylum*, near Pittsburgh.

Dr. Herbermann has scarcely touched one important historical fact in his narrative—the appointment of the Benedictine Dom Didier as Prefect-Apostolic of this projected French empire. Didier's appointment, which Shea wrongly construes as another evidence of the confusion in ecclesiastical jurisdiction caused by the interference of Propaganda,⁶ was wholly in keeping with canon

³ In May or June, 1788, Joel Barlow, the political Pamphleteer, went to Paris as agent of the mother-company, the Ohio Company, and under his facile and poetic pen, glowing prospectuses of the Scioto Valley were sent broadcast throughout France. Some of the phrases he used in the proposals show how badly the stockholders were deceived—"frost even in winter almost entirely unknown . . . a river . . . abounding in excellent fish of a vast size . . . noble forests, consisting of trees that spontaneously produce sugar . . . a plant that yields ready-made candles . . . no taxes to pay . . . no military services. . . ." And all this of a land that was reeking with swamp fevers and malaria!

⁴ Marietta received its name from General Farnum, who planned the future French city on the Ohio, in July, 1788, in honor of Marie Antoinette. De Warville says of Farnum: "—il portait si loin sa haine contre les Anglais, qu'il voulait qu'on ne parlât plus que grec dans les Etats-Unis!" *op. cit.* Vol. ii, p. 423.

⁵ A writer in the *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine* (Vol. v, pp. 45-47) is of the opinion that the tradition, which exists on the Gallipolis refugees in Maine, is without historic foundation. Father de Barth who refused the See of Philadelphia in 1816 was a son of one of the Gallipolis settlers.

⁶ SHEA, *Life and Times of Archbishop Carroll*, p. 480. New York, 1888. For the story of these French intrigues to control the ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the United States, cf. *Les nominations épiscopales aux premiers temps de l'Épiscopat Américain*, article in the *Mélanges Moeller* by Zwierlein, pp. 527-56. Louvain, 1914. Cf. also *Documents relative to the adjustment of the Roman Catholic organization in the United States*, in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. xv (1910), pp. 800-29.

law, as is evident from the documents which follow, and which are now published for the first time from photographic copies taken in the *Archives of Propaganda*, at Rome.

I

The first of these documents is a letter from the promoters of the Scioto Company to the Papal Nuncio at Paris, presenting the name of the Abbé du Boisnantier to the Holy Father as the prospective Bishop of the new See of Gallipolis, Ohio:

A son Excellence, Monseigneur le Nonce,

La nouvelle colonie des françois qui se forme dans l'amerique septentrionale, entre le Scioto et l'Oyo, etant presque toute composée de catholiques qui desirent vivre et mourir dans la profession interieure et exterieure de leur foy, considerant a quels dangers ils seroient exposés pour le salut, s'ils se trouvoient sans eglise, sans prêtres, sans culte public, sans hierarchie, et abandonnés a quelques écclesiastiques mercenaires que les malheurs qui dechirent la france pourroient conduire au milieu d'eux par l'espoir d'y faire fortune, supplie humblement notre très saint père le pape, de leur accorder un évêque qui préside au maintien de la doctrine et de la discipline religieuse, et qui, toujours uni par principes à la sainte église romaine, puisse reprimer les abus qui se pourroient glisser dans ce nouvel établissement, soit contre la foy soit contre les moeurs. La nouvelle colonie desire cette grace avec autant plus d'ardeur qu'occupant un terrain de plus de deux cent lieux d'étendue, il n'y a pas d'évêque à qui on puisse commodement avoir recours soit pour des ordinations, soit pour la Confirmation, soit pour des dispenses que les évêques seuls sont dans l'usage d'accorder, et que d'ailleurs elle espère que la fondation d'une ville épiscopale [Gallipolis] attireroit dans son sein un nombre prodigieux de familles dispersées dans ce pays presque inculte, et qui y vivoient en corps de société comme en unite de croyance.

A ces causes, les principaux Membres de la colonie proposent Monsieur Duboisnantier, prêtre habitué à s. Rock, et supplient très respectueusement sa sainteté de, lui donner le titre d'Evêque, avec toute la juridiction spirituelle que peut demander une mission aussi étendue que celle du Scioto.

[Signed]

Guérin
de Lézay-Marnesia
Delaroche
de Val d'Esprêmesnil
William Playfair
J. A. Chais, de Soissons

MM. Barons de Maubranche, Malartic, Bergent.
du Bellan
Smith
Madame Thiébaut
de Gravier
Viscount de Bellon⁷

There is no record, among the papers of the d'Esprêmesnil family, of the elevation of Father Du Boisnantier to the episcopal See of Gallipolis in the wilderness of Ohio. Shea is correct in his surmise that Du Boisnantier was proposed prior to Didier. This supposition is strengthened by the *Bruté Papers*.⁸ He did not come to America.

⁷ *Arch. di Prop. Fide, America Centrale*, Vol. ii (1776-1790), ff. 388-389.

⁸ "A curious fact.—The late Bishop Bruté, among some papers of his which have come under our notice, states that a Catholic bishopric was proposed to be erected at Scioto, or Gallipolis, in Ohio, of early as the year 1789, which was the period also of Rev. Mr. Carroll's appointment to the See as

II

The second of these documents, dated Paris, March 22, 1790, is similar to the first. It is a petition from the heads of the company to the Papal Nuncio, asking for the election of a Benedictine monk of St. Maur, Dom Didier, as Bishop of the Colony:

A son Excellence, Monseigneur Dugnani, Nonce Apostolique,

Les personnes reunies pour former une colonie dans l'Amérique Septentrionale, sur les bords de la Riviere Scioto, desirant que ce nouvel établissement qui s'y forme puisse jouir de tous les secours spirituels qui dirigent et assurent la soumission à l'église catholique apostolique et romaine, après les informations nécessaires pour un choix si important ont nommé le Père Dom Didier Benedictin de la congregation de St. Maur pour presider tout cequi serait rélatif au culte divin et aux instructions de la Jeunesse. Les ci-dites personnes, aujourd'hui assemblées, ayant pris connaissance du *Mémoire* présenté par Dom Didier à son Excellence, Monseigneur le Nonce, ont l'honneur de supplier son Excellence de vouloir bien proteger auprès de sa Sainteté les observations qui sont présentées dans cette requête. La colonie sera très flattée d'obtenir par la Protection de son Excellence des secours spirituels, qui pourront contribuer au succes d'un établissement dont tous les principes ont pour objet la gloire de la religion, la pureté des moeurs, et le bonheur de la colonie, et ont signé le present ce 22 Mars, 1790.

[Signed]

Baron de Maubranche
de Lézy-Marnesia, fils
M. de Lézy-Marnesia
Malartic
de Bondy
pour mon frère, Didier.

Gravier
du Val d'Esprémesnil
Vte de Bellon
J. A. Chais, de Soissons
De Graille
*etc., etc.*⁹

The fact that some of these names appear on both letters would seem to indicate that there had been no rivalry between Du Boisnantier and Didier. Probably, the first-named, on reflection, declined the empty honor. There is no insincerity in the declaration of their intention to establish a well-organized Catholic life at Gallipolis. Frenchmen of all classes were anxious to leave France to escape "l'intolérable tyrannie des vizirs françois," as de Warville tells us, when they saw the ancient bulwarks of Christianity falling in ruins around them.¹⁰ The *Mémoire*, mentioned in this supplication for Didier's election, gives a general survey of their spiritual plans.

Baltimore. Mr. Bruté being at Paris in 1824, learned this remarkable fact from the Abbé Boisnantier, a canon of St. Denys, who had been himself nominated to the new See in Ohio. No reasons, however, are mentioned, to account for the subsequent withdrawal of these appointments. It was probably caused by the circumstances mentioned in Dr. Spalding's *Sketches of Kentucky* (p. 62), where he speaks of the French Catholics who had settled at Gallipolis. The colonists had been defrauded in the purchase of lands, the title proving defective, and many of them returned to France in consequence of this unfortunate transaction, which marred the prospects of the new settlement, and probably suspended the proceedings relative to the contemplated See. It is rather singular, however, that the fact of the new bishopric having been designed, has never been publicly alluded to in connection with the history of the West." (*U. S. Catholic Magazine*, 1845, p. 407.)

⁹ Arch. di Prop. Fide, American Centrale, Vol. ii (1776-1790), ff. 379-379v.

¹⁰ BRISOT DE WARVILLE, *Nouveau Voyage dans les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale, fait en 1788*, Vol. i, p. 377. Paris, 1791.

III

The Didier *Mémoire* bears the same date as the preceding letter, March 22, 1790. The number of the emigrants, who were almost entirely Catholic, was increasing to a considerable extent; and, since he had been chosen as their spiritual head in the New World, he feels obliged to strengthen the request of the leaders by making a personal application for ecclesiastical powers—either as Bishop of Gallipolis or as Vicar-Apostolic—to carry out the religious and educational plans of the colonists. It is apparent from the *Mémoire* that the Nuncio had already called his attention to the fact that the United States had just been given a Bishop, in the person of John Carroll, of Baltimore; but Didier argues that the distance between Baltimore and Gallipolis was so great that Bishop Carroll could not guide the spiritual destinies of the emigrants. The French people, moreover, were accustomed to have their own Bishops, and Didier begs the Nuncio to hasten the conclusion of the matter at Rome, as he was then ready to start for Havre:

Monseigneur,

J'ai l'honneur de représenter à Votre Excellence qu'une société de personnes distinguées et Catholiques, a fait des requisitions considérables au Scioto, partie de de l'Amérique septentrionale, qu'elle y fait passer plusieurs habitans des campagnes, que plusieurs particuliers suivent cette exemple, que ces émigrations s'élèvent déjà à un degré de population assez considérable pour mériter l'attention religieuse du très saint Père et celle de Votre Excellence. Ils ont droit d'attendre du chef visible de l'église les secours spirituels qui lui seul a la pouvoir de leur procurer. Cette société, Monseigneur, m'a fait l'honneur de me choisir pour son pasteur. Ce choix m'honore, excite mon zèle et me détermine à sacrifier ma personne et mes foibles talens à la Religion, à l'Education, et au bonheur de cette colonie naissante. Mais, Monseigneur, il ne m'est pas possible de remplir ce but, si je n'ai point une mission légale. Votre Excellence sait que l'Etat dans lequel se va fonder cette colonie ayant pour Religion dominante la protestante, et tolérant toutes les sectes, il n'existe aucune puissance ecclésiastique à la quelle je puisse avoir recours. Votre Excellence m'a fait l'honneur de me faire observer qu'il existe un évêque à Baltimore. Qu'il me soit permis de lui représenter qu'on peut regarder cet évêque comme nul pour le Scioto, à raison des distances considérables qui nous separeront; la difficulté des communications, le danger d'abandonner un troupeau que l'on pourra regarder comme une église naissante; tous ces obstacles pourroient, Monseigneur, retarder les fruits que le religion pourroit faire en ce pays, et même détruire insensiblement dans le coeur des habitans les principes religieux qu'ils ont reçu dans leur enfance, par les difficultés qu'ils éprouveroient dans l'exercice, la facilite qu'ils pourroient rencontrer à professer une autre Religion qu'on leur persuaderoit être aussi bonne. Votre Excellence connoit le coeur de l'homme. Elle sait qu'il faut se prêter à l'opinion, aux usages et aux habitudes, lorsque l'on vent operer le bien. Il faut donc qu'elle ait la bonté de considerer la nature des hommes qui vont habiter ces nouvelles regions, ce sont des François Catholiques, accoutumés à être soumis pour le spirituel à des Evêques et à des Prêtres. Je pense, Monseigneur, qu'il seroit dangereux de leur laisser perdre ces avantageuses impressions. Il faut aussi que Votre Excellence envisage le nombre considerable des Emigrants, qui vont former tout d'un coup une masse d'habitans assez forte, pour avoir besoin d'un chef revêtu de pouvoirs spirituels très étendus. Que ce soit un Evêque ou un Vicaire Apostolique, il faut l'un ou l'autre, c'est au très saint Père et à Votre Excellence à juger ce qui conviendra le

mieux. Je n'ai point, Monseigneur, assez de presumption, pour solliciter en ma faveur. Ces titres qu'exigent des talens superieurs et des vertus que je n'ose me flatter d'avoir, un zèle ardent, une religion solide et éclairée, quelques connaissances—d'utilité publique, un coeur compatissant auquel rien ne repugne, lorsqu'il s'agit de soulager l'humanité souffrante, sont des titres pour pretendre au rang de subalterne. Il faut des qualités plus éminentes lorsqu'on est destiné à être placé sur le chandelier, c'est ce qui fait que mes vues ne se portent point à ce degré d'élevation. Le but de ma supplique, Monseigneur, est de vous faire envisager le besoin d'un évêque, ou de tout autre Supérieur ecclésiastique, auquel je puisse m'adresser pour les pouvoirs relatifs à l'emploi auquel je suis destiné par le choix d'une société, la nécessité de sa residence au Scioto, tant pour le present que pour l'avenir; residence à laquelle j'attache le succès de l'établissement de la Religion dans ces contrées et sa propagation future dans cette partie du Globe. Si ces reflexions, Monseigneur, ne sont point assez determinantes, pour faire en ce moment l'établissement que j'ai l'honneur de proposer à Votre Excellence, je la supplie de vouloir bien employer ses bons offices auprès de sa Sainteté pour m'obtenir avant mon depart tout ce qu'elle jugera necessaire pour le plus grand bien de la religion, la gloire de Dieu et le bonheur des peuples qui me sont confiés. Je me contenterai des pouvoirs qui me seront accordés, dans la forme et l'étendue qu'il aura plu à la sagesse et à la providence du très Saint Père de les circonscrire, et je les accepterai avec la reconnaissance et la soumission la plus entière. Je supplie Votre Excellence de vouloir bien presser au Cour de Rome l'expedition prompte de l'objet de ma demande, attendu la proximité de mon depart. Permettez que Votre Excellence trouve ici l'hommage respectueux de mon sincère devouement et les sentimens distingués avec lesquels j'ai l'honneur d'être,

Monseigneur,

Votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur

Fr. Didier.¹¹

IV

The same day, on receipt of this *Mémoire*, the Nuncio sent a dispatch to Rome, dated March 22, 1790, to Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, announcing the project of the Scioto Company and their selection of Dom Didier as Bishop of Gallipolis, Ohio. The Nuncio avers that Didier is unknown to him, but that he will inquire as to his character and talents for the post. He has asked Didier for a more complete explanation of the plans of the company, and when these are presented to him, he will send them on to Rome:

Eminenza,

Una colonia francese di varie centinaia di persone va a stabilirsi nell'America settentrionale. Ha questa fatto l'acquisto di una quantità di terreno sul bordo dell'Ohio a cento leghe di distanza dal mare. Fra le persone, che sono alla testa di questa colonia vi è il Signor d'Espremenil Consigliere del Parlamento di Parigi, e soggetto ben noto il quale credo abbia formato un piano di costituzione a governo di questa piccola repubblica. Uno dei primi loro oggetti è stato di provvedere a tutto ciò che può esser necessario per l'esercizio del culto della nostra santa religione per l'istruzione e per l'educazione. Hanno quindi prescelto un certo D. Didier monaco

¹¹ Arch. di Prop. Fide, America Centrale, Vol. ii (1776-1790), ff. 380-383v.

di S. Maur, che io non conosco, ma di cui mi procurerò qualche informazione. Questo religioso mi ha fatto presentare l'annesso foglio, in cui espone la commissione, di cui deve essere incaricato, e domanda alla Sacra Congregazione le necessarie facoltà. Io però gli ho fatto rispondere che oltre il suddetto foglio sarebbe stato opportuno che li deputati di questa colonia facessero conoscere alla Sacra Congregazione le loro idee, e li mezzi che si offrono a fornire per l'esecuzione, onde la Sacra Congregazione possa acquistare una sufficiente cognizione di questo nuovo stabilimento, e dare quelle providenze che la natura del luogo, il numero delle persone ed altre circostanze fisiche e morali potranno esigere per il miglior successo. Questa memoria adunque mi sarà mandata nel corrente di questa settimana, che io poi in seguito accompagnerò con lettera d'ufficio all'Eminenza Vostra. Ho creduto soltanto di prevenire Vostra Eminenza, stante che essendo imminente la partenza dell'suddetto religioso, mi si fa premura di qualche risposta.¹²

Parigi, il 22 marzo, 1790.

Umilissimo. . . .

V

On March 29, 1790, the Nuncio wrote a second time to Cardinal Antonelli, saying that three or four priests were preparing to go to Gallipolis, but that Didier had been chosen as the spiritual head of the colony:

Eminmo. e Revmo. Signore,

Alcune famiglie francesi sono in procinto di partire per l'America Settentrionale. Hanno quivi comprate delle terre sulla riva del fiume Scioto, alla distanza però di 100 leghe dal mare, ed hanno il progetto di stabilire in esse una colonia. Fra i loro primi pensieri hanno avuto quello di provvedersi de' ministri della religione. Vi sono tre o quattro ecclesiastici disposti a partire in breve. Ma oltre a questi, vi è un Religioso della Cong. di S. Mauro, il quale specialmente vien deputato da questa colonia per essere alla testa di tutto ciò che riguarda il culto, l'amministrazione de'sacramenti, l'istruzione, ed anche l'educazione. Questo religioso pertanto mi ha formato un foglio, che qui annetto unitamente all'altro sottoscritto dai capi della stessa colonia. Da tali fogli V. E. e la Congregazione vedranno quanto il suddetto religioso desidera, e quanto gli può esser necessario per contribuire al buon esito dello stabilimento in ciò che riguarda la religione, e i costumi. E con profondissimo ossequio sono.

Dell' E. V.

Umilissimo, divotissimo, obbligatissimo servitore

✠A. Arcivescovo di Rodi.¹³

Parigi, 29 Marzo, 1790.

VI

Propaganda yielded to the wishes of the Scioto Company and on April 26 1790, appointed Didier—not Bishop or Vicar-Apostolic, as he wished, but Vicar-General in *spiritualibus* for the space of seven years. A copy of this Brief exists in the *Catholic Archives*, at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and the following translation was published in the *Researches* of the American Catholic Historical Society (Vol. xii (1895), pp. 50–51).

¹² *Arch. di Prop. Fide, America Centrale*, Vol. ii (1776–1790), ff. 381–382.

¹³ *Arch. di Prop. Fide America Centrale*, Vol. ii (1776–1790), fol. 378.

26th April, 1790.

Whereas, it has been communicated by the Most Rev. Archbishop of Rhodes, in France, that some men of illustrious piety and distinguished family have formed the design of emigrating to North America and establishing a colony on the lands of the river Scioto, where they have already, to this issue, bought considerable land; and whereas, for the sake of Catholic worship to which they are and will be most attached, they have arranged to bring with them a priest who may, as well on the way as in the settlements where they will fix their homes, administer to them the Sacraments, undertake the preaching of the word of God, look after the care of souls, they humbly ask of the Holy Father to grant to Rev. Father Didier, Benedictine Monk of the Order of Saint Benedict, Congregation of St. Maur, all the faculties which may seem opportune for the spiritual government of so many Catholic families: the Sacred Congregation, through the most eminent Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect, agreeing to their petitions, decreed, if it should please the Holy Father, that the faculties of *Formula IV* could be conceded to Father Didier, if he should be approved for pastoral work by the Archbishop of Paris, or his Vicar-General in spiritualities, for seven years, with complete jurisdiction over all the French who emigrate with him, *on condition that the lands and place where they should found their lands and Colony should not be within the diocese of any Bishop within the limits of the government and sway of the United States, which altogether lies under the jurisdiction of the Bishop lately appointed in Baltimore by the Apostolic See. Further, Father Didier can in no way use the above faculties unless by the consent of the said Bishop*, and is bound every year to inform the Sacred Congregation of the state of his mission, the number of faithful and their spiritual progress.

Which decree being communicated to him by the Most Eminent Cardinal Prefect, at an audience given on the above date, His Holiness graciously approved in every particular, and conceded the said faculties *ad Septennium*.

L. Cardinal Antonelli, *Prefect*.

Dated Rome, April 28, 1790.

G. Carpeyna, *Secretary*.

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, twenty-sixth of April, 1790.

Through Most Eminent Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect, the Sacred Congregation appointed Rev. Father Didier, Benedictine of the Congregation of St. Maur, Superior of the French Colony on the banks of the river Scioto, for seven years, with the authority necessary for the spiritual government of the said Colony, according to prescription of the decrees of the Sacred Congregation, and with the limits placed as to their exercise, and at no other time and in no other way.

L. Cardinal Antonelli, *Prefect*.

Dated Rome, April 28, 1790.

G. Carpeyna, *Secretary*.

VII

It is evident from the original *Brief* of Appointment that Didier's powers as Prefect-Apostolic of the Colony were in no way to interfere with the jurisdiction, enjoyed by Bishop Carroll, over all the United States. The territory beyond the Alleghenies was an obscurely known one, and in 1790 it was not altogether certain whose was the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over this part of the Ohio Valley. But the *Brief* reads with a definitiveness which leaves no room for doubt that the Sacred Congregation had no intention to shorten the diocesan limits of Bishop Carroll nor to give Didier any faculties which could be used without Carroll's express consent. In his letter of May 10, 1790, to Cardinal Antonelli,

the Papal Nuncio of Paris also understands that Didier's faculties would have to be confirmed by Bishop Carroll before they could be used. About Didier himself he could find little, but he has been informed that he is a religious of good character, sound in doctrine, though somewhat of an impetuous and idealistic nature. Didier had already left for Havre, at the date of the Nuncio's writing (May 10, 1790), and was preparing to leave about the end of the month for America. Bishop Carroll, in a letter to Plowden, dated September 3, 1791, speaks of "the arrival, last year, of a Benedictine Monk, with a congregation, on the banks of the Ohio."¹⁴

Emmo. Illmo. Signore,

La nuova colonia de' Francesi che parte per l'America, va a stabilirsi lungo il fiume Sciotto dentro lo stato della Virginia, anzi essa formerà in appresso una porzione di d^o Stato, onde per ragione della località, la missione della Colonia med^{ma} pare compresa nella giurisdizione di già accordata dalla S. Cong^{ne} al Vic^o. Aplico. degli Stati Uniti. Circa le qualità personali di D. Didier, sono assicurato esser egli un buon religioso, e di sani principii circa la dottrina, ma a quanto ho inteso, è un po' vivo e progettista. Egli è già partito per *Hauvre de Grace*, e di là verso la metà di questo mese s'imbarcherà per l'America. M^r d' Espremenill fa però qui gli affari della compagnia, ed egli si caricherà di trasmetter la risposta, che la S. Cong^{ne} farà al sud^o religioso come questi arrivato in America troverassi in notabile distanza dal Vic^o Aplico, ne potrà aver da lui le necessarie facoltà, se non dopo qualche tempo, così implora fin da ora della S. Cong^{ne} le opportune facoltà provisionali finché queste gli vengano confermate da quel Vic^o Aplico

Dell' E. V.,

Immo etc.

Parigi 10 Maggio, 1790.

✠A., Arc. di Rodi.¹⁵

VIII

Propaganda intended, therefore, that the new colony would depend almost immediately upon the Bishop of Baltimore. A further letter of the Nuncio to Antonelli, dated Paris, May 17, 1790, is interesting because it appears to hint that Du Boisnantier was asserting his right to the See of Gallipolis, as mentioned in the *Bruté Papers*.

Emo., etc.,

Essendo D. Didier già partito da Parigi, non ho potuto eseguire che per lettera le commissioni di cui V. E. mi ha onorato. Non so se il mio piego arriverà in tempo di raggiungerlo a Havre de Grace, ove da vari giorni era egli sul momento d'imbarcarsi, ma quand'anche fosse partito, M^r d' Espremenill mi ha fatto sapere, che potrà facilmente spedirglielo essendo imminente la partenza d'altre navi mercantili per la med^{ma} destinazione. Qui in Parigi vi è un Prete, che bramerebbe di divenir vescovo di quella colonia, ed a ottenuto, che i capi di essa s'interessino per la sua elezione. M^r d' Espremenill mi ha quindi presentato il foglio, che annetto. Per

¹⁴ Cf. HUGHES, *History of the Society of Jesus in North America*, Documents, Vol. i, Pt. ii, p. 754. New York, 1910. It is curious to note also in this connection that the Sulpician Father Galais, during the discussions preparatory to the foundation of St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, suggested "that the Seminary should be founded at Gallipolis, where many emigrants from France at that time proposed to settle." SHEA, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 377.

¹⁵ *Arch. di Prop. Fide, America Centrale*, Vol. ii (1776-1790), ff, 384-386.

quanto credo che la cosa non convenga in alcun modo sì per le disposizioni, che si annunziano nel soggetto, sì per le misure già prese circa la dipendenza della colonia dal vescovo di Baltimore, e la facoltà recentemente accordata a F. Didier, non ha potuto ricusare di mandarle il sud^o foglio. Se V. E. crede mi basterà d'avere una lettera ostensibile per M^r d'Espremenill il quale non lascia di essere un soggetto, che merita de riguardi, e delle attenzioni. E con profond^{mo} ossequio,

Pariji, 17 Maggio, 1790.

Dell' E. V., etc.¹⁶

The failure of the whole scheme is but another incident in the already long list of utopian projects which have had their stage in America from the early colonial days and later, when such attempts as the New Ireland Plantation and the Celtic Republic were made for the oppressed people of Europe. It is difficult to say with any degree of accuracy what became of Dom Didier after the collapse of the Gallipolis colony. O'Hanlon (*Life and Scenery of Missouri*, p. 64-5), states that Father Didier officiated at St. Louis from 1793 to 1799.¹⁷ It is surmised that he went to New Orleans in 1800, and it is probable that the ecclesiastical archives of that province would shed some light on the rest of his life. Shea calls him the pioneer Benedictine in this country and says that he died at St. Louis. "Left without a priest, the settlement at Gallipolis soon lost all coherence and dwindled away. Religion gradually faded out. Children were no longer baptized; they did not even ask Dr. Carroll to send them a priest. On Sundays instead of prayer and Catholic instructions, meetings were held where deism and infidelity were openly advocated. Such was the end of the Prefecture-Apostolic of the Scioto."¹⁸

¹⁶ *Arch. di Prop. Fide, America Centrale*, Vol. ii (1776-1790), ff. 387-387v.

¹⁷ Mention is made in BILLON, *Annals of St. Louis* (St. Louis, 1886), p. 465, of a John Pierre Didier; but it is not stated whether or not he was a priest.

¹⁸ SHEA, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 481-2. When Fathers Badin and Barrières visited Gallipolis in September, 1793, on their way to the Kentucky missions, their arrival was hailed with joy and they stayed several days ministering to the people; they baptized forty children. (Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. ii, p. 455.) It would look from this as if Didier had deserted his people. BRECKENBRIDGE in his *Recollections*, says "they had vanished like the palace of Aladdin. Cf. for the whole melancholy tragedy, VOLNEV, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, pp. 381-93. "Night was coming on when I reached the village of Gallipolis. I could only distinguish three rows of little white houses built on the flat summit of the bank of the Ohio. . . . I was struck with its wild appearance, and the sallow complexions, thin visages, sickly looks, and weary air, of all its inhabitants. They were not desirous of conversing with me" (p. 385, *English trans.*). There is a letter in ROBIN, *Nouveaux Voyages* (p. 17), from Dom Didier (undated but written after his arrival at Gallipolis) to Father Piot sub-Prior of the Royal Abbey of St. Denis, to which Didier belonged. It must have been written during the first days of the colony, for it breathes great hope for the future. He says in part: "J'ai rencontré beaucoup d'Américains catholiques. J'ai baptisé beaucoup de leurs enfans; ils ne voyent de Presbytres que quatre fois par an. J'ai vu des Sauvages catholiques, parlant un peu Français, qui m'ont baisé les mains. . . ." It is strange that no letters of Didier exist in the *Gallipolis Papers*, now in the *Van Wormer Library* (Ohio Philosophical Society), of the University of Cincinnati. These papers have been arranged and some of them edited by Belote, in the seventh volume of the *Quarterly Publications of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* (Vol. vii, 1907, No. 2). Other documents exist in the collection of the *American Antiquarian Society* and in those of the *New York Historical Society*.